AMENDMENT TO CLAIMS

In the claims:

1. - 31. (previously cancelled)

32. - 46. (cancelled)

47. - 51. (previously cancelled)

52. (previously added) A method for treating an intervertebral disc of a patient, comprising:

a) advancing an active electrode through an annulus fibrosus of the disc to form an opening in the annulus fibrosus;

b) positioning the active electrode within a nucleus pulposus of the disc;

c) applying a high frequency voltage between the active electrode and a return electrode, wherein the voltage is sufficient to contract at least a portion of the nucleus pulposus; and

d) while continuing said step c), withdrawing the active electrode from the disc via the opening in the annulus fibrosus, wherein the voltage is sufficient to at least partially close the opening in the annulus fibrosus.

53. (previously added) The method of claim 52, further comprising sealing the opening in the annulus fibrosus as a result of the voltage applied during said step d).

54. (previously added) The method of claim 52, wherein the voltage is sufficient to effect contraction of collagen fibers in the nucleus pulposus or the annulus fibrosus.

55. (previously added) The method of claim 52, wherein the opening in the annulus fibrosus is partially closed via contraction of collagen fibers in the annulus fibrosus.

56. (previously added) The method of claim 52, wherein contraction of the nucleus pulposus is effected via contraction of collagen fibers in the nucleus pulposus.

57. (previously added) The method of claim 52, further comprising: delivering an electrically conductive fluid to the active electrode, wherein the electrically conductive fluid provides a current flow path between the active electrode and the return electrode.

58. (previously added) The method of claim 52, wherein during said step c) at least a portion of the nucleus pulposus is heated to a temperature in the range of from about 60° C to 70° C.

59. (previously added) The method of claim 52, wherein said step c) comprises applying the voltage in the range of from about 45 volts rms to 60 volts rms.